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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the history of the civic education of immigrants to the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was a time of great social upheaval, not only for the new immigrant groups, but also for members of groups that had arrived in the United States earlier. Public schools were seen as the logical institutions for assimilation. Because of the cultural diversity of these newer groups and deeply ingrained traditions among members of earlier groups, Americanization meant more than acquisition of the knowledge and skills required by industrial societies; it also meant eradicating cultural differences and impressing American values. While this approach often made many children ashamed of their cultural backgrounds, some were able to become Americanized and retain pride in their native cultures. (IS)

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The Making of "Good" Americans:
Civic Education of Immigrants

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Washington, D. C., November 15, 1984.

Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.

Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted

Introduction

Among the many issues confronting American education during the mid-1980's is the presence of many children who were born in Southeast Asia or the Caribbean or who are children of parents who recently moved from these areas. These students represent a distinct challenge to our school systems. They bring with them a variety of languages, cultural experiences, norms, and values as well as each child's own unique personal history. This situation raises the issue of how the national community in general, and the schools which serve that community in particular, should assist these new residents to become fully participating members of the community. How do we help them become "good" citizens? This paper examines the history of the education of immigrants, particularly the civic education of this group, during the period of massive immigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The purpose is not so much to identify approaches that "work" as it is to ascertain the nature of that experience for the immigrant and to discern patterns that may inform our attempts to confront a new and different wave of immigration today.

Obviously, the question of how to educate the immigrant for civic participation is not new. In many respects, the history of American education is also the history of this nation's

attempts to educate those who are a part of this society by some measure of choice -- the immigrants. The study of the history of the education of immigrants is marked by two quite distinct approaches to the question. Until the past two decades, the enterprise was viewed by most historians as the capstone of American democracy, providing opportunity and access to the talented and deserving regardless of background (Cubberley, 1934). Revisionist historians have attacked this interpretation as naive and idealistic at best and more likely deliberately false. From their perspective, public schooling was (and is) an imposition by the elite leadership of corporate capitalism upon the masses of the lower class in order to control and manipulate (Katz, 1968; Spring, 1972; and Green, 1972).

More recently, social historians who have examined the question of the education of immigrants present a more complicated picture of the events and inferred intentions of the people involved. Tyack (1974) sees the educational experience of the immigrant within the larger framework of the progressive reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While acknowledging the pernicious consequences of these policies and programs for immigrant families, he does not see the "administrative progressives" as either villains in themselves or as tools of some capitalist elite. Ravitch (1978) argues that the truth:

...is too complicated to be explained by simplistic slogans. Not every minority group is or was similar; some did not want to be assimilated, but others did. Each group must be studied separately, within the context of its own interests and with due consideration of the historical situation (p. 214).

While living and working in the United States made the immigrant a part of the society in a physical sense, any sense of cultural identity required a period of observation, formal and informal education, and a conscious or non-conscious choice to become a part of the new country. The speed with which the immigrants accomplished this transition, if at all, varied among nationalities, families, and individuals.

An extensive literature on the education of the immigrant has developed over the years (Seller, 1981). Most of this work focuses upon this education in general and does not treat any particular curricular area. However, since the Americanization of the immigrant was such a central theme in the education of the immigrant during this period, much of this work does have significance for this study. As shall be seen though, Americanization was conceived broadly, including hygiene and nutrition as well as patriotism.

Historical Context

Though we of the twentieth century often view our time as the period in which change has become so ubiquitous that none who came before had to confront the instability and uncertainty of massive change on a scale comparable to our experience, this parochial perspective causes us to underestimate the conditions which people prior to this time had to confront. In the half century from 1870 to 1920, the people of the United States were caught up in the on-going industrialization and urbanization as well as the massive waves of immigrants from Europe. As Weibe

(1967) has pointed out, American society as constituted in 1870 was incapable of facing these challenges. The ensuing fifty years saw the defenders of small-town America turn away from the changes and cling even more closely to normative structures and the values which supported them which were no longer effective. Still others tried to reduce the problems of a complex urban, industrial, and ethnically-diverse America to one issue such as the single-tax plan.

Ultimately it was none of these but a "new middle class" -- largely urban professional men and women -- who developed the new values of "continuity and regularity, administration and management" in order to cope with twentieth-century problems (Weibe, 1967, p. viii).

Within this framework, schooling in general, and particularly that for the immigrant and the children of immigrants, can be seen as a part of this larger movement to bring order and stability to a society undergoing an enormous transition. Using Weibe's model in his analysis of urban education, Tyack (1974) argues that the "administrative progressives" sought to bring a regularity to the educational experience of children and that, by focusing solely on the process of standardization, they ill-served the pluralistic character of American society.

The immigration of this period was substantially different from that which occurred in the pre-Civil War era of the country's history. The most obvious difference is the magnitude, the enormity of the number of people who made the decision to move to this country. An estimated 25 million people entered the United States during this time period (Cordasco, 1973). In addition, the "new" immigrants were often

from very different backgrounds than those who had come earlier. Through the antebellum period, the vast preponderance of the people moving to the area of the United States were from northern and western Europe and the only notable non-Protestant group had been the Irish immigrants of the 1840's. However, the country of origin for most of the immigrants between the Civil War and World War I was in southern and eastern Europe. Further, they were from rural, agrarian backgrounds and most frequently were of the Catholic or Jewish faiths (Berrol, 1978).

The atmosphere into which they moved was often cold and suspicious if not openly hostile. The instability of the nineteenth century was not conducive to an open, receptive environment. As Weibe (1967) noted, the defenders of the faith (i.e., small town America) feared and distrusted this "foreign element." Higham (1955) has detailed the consequences of nativism during this period of American history. This intense opposition to any immigrant group due to its alleged "foreign connection" was founded upon three themes. First, the most powerful anti-foreign tradition is anti-Catholicism. This attitude was rooted in the Reformation and was a part of the fabric of American ideas in the nineteenth century. The Catholic Church was seen as an authoritarian regime which was allied with the European monarchical governments. American liberty and European popery were irreconcilable.

Though this nation had been created in revolution, anti-radicalism was the second major theme of nativism. From the period of the French Revolution, the Americans had shared

the European antipathy for the excesses of the French and later German radicals. Though this suspicion was less widely shared than the anti-Catholicism basis of nativist ideology, the more conservative element in American society had succeeded in tying Jeffersonian democracy to Jacobin terror. Thus, the conservatives established the Alien and Sedition Acts and used these measures against critics of the American government. During the mid-nineteenth century, the revolutionary ideas of Europe became even more unattractive and threatening with emergence of socialist ideas, particularly, of course, those of Marx. Higham further argues that the third theme of Anglo-Saxon supremacy melded the anti-Catholic and anti-radical ideas of "true" Americans to create this intense suspicion and fear -- and, at times, paranoia -- among much of this country's populace. This race-based chauvinism was rooted in the merger of nationalistic history and the infant discipline of natural history and, in conjunction with the anti-Catholic and anti-radical ideas, created a racist, ethnocentric perspective which animated much of American society.

As Tyack (1974) has pointed out, many of the immigrant children (and adults) were having to confront more than just a hostile community when they entered this new land. The United States and much of Europe was undergoing a fundamental transformation -- the combined effects of urbanization and industrialization. In order to function effectively within this environment, the immigrants had to acquire those habits and skills required by the urban, industrial community. Indeed,

much of the American population was involved in this process of modernization. But for many of those new arrivals, the demands of this new society were strange at best. Modernization entails much more than the acquisition of basic language and numeric competence -- though these skills are quite significant. But equally important for the newcomer to the urban, industrial environment, whether he or she is from the rural South or Poland, are the knowledge and skills necessary to work within the orderly, routinized bureaucracies that were emerging during this period. Thus, the newcomer must learn to complete forms, to regulate one's life by a clock rather than by the sun and the seasons, and to accept those norms and values which underlie this system.

The common school was seen as the institution most capable of accomplishing the unprecedented goal of assimilating the millions of immigrants into this emerging order. Public education was charged with correcting all manner of perceived shortcomings among this population. School leaders expressed great confidence in their institution's ability to meet this challenge.

Educators' rhetoric of Americanization was often messianic, a mixture of fear outweighed by hope, of desire for social control accompanied by a quest for equality of opportunity for the newcomers.... The principal of DeWitt Clinton High School in New York, for example, wrote in 1902 that "education will solve every problem of our national life, even that of assimilating our foreign element.... Ignorance is the mother of anarchy, poverty and crime. The nation has a right to demand intelligence and virtue of every citizen, and to obtain these by force if necessary." He went on to claim that a "pupil's very association

with the intellectual and honorable men and women [in school] tends to inspire toward higher standards of living" (Tyack, 1974, p. 232).

This optimistic view of the effects of schooling was predicated on the nativist ideas described by Higham. The pressure to Americanize the immigrant and the notion that the public school was the only appropriate institution (parochial schools were suspect, of course) led Oregon to mandate compulsory public education in the 1920's. Though the U. S. Supreme Court struck down this law in Pierce v. Society of Sisters, it does illustrate the extent to which nativist's ideas of anti-Catholicism, anti-radicalism, and Anglo-Saxon supremacy were at the heart of the Americanization movement. As one Klansman stated during this debate, "Somehow these mongrel hordes must be Americanized..." (Yudoff, Kirp, van Teel, & Levin, 1982, p. 11).

Americanization of Immigrants

In a 1908 survey of 37 cities, the U. S. Senate Immigration Commission found 60 nationalities represented in the school population and that 58 percent of all students had fathers born outside the United States. Particularly in the large cities of the east coast, children of immigrants were sometimes excluded from school for lack of space. Because of the enormous diversity of the immigrant population and the deeply ingrained nativist traditions, Americanization encompassed a great deal more than the acquisition of the knowledge and skills demanded by the modern industrial society -- language and numeric competence, adherence to clock time, and familiarity with forms,

regulations, and other manifestations of a bureaucratic society. The American native from the farm had to master these complexities of life in the crowded cities. But the Czech, for example, had to learn the new and discard the old. For many of the proponents of Americanization, both those working directly with the immigrants and those "concerned" citizens who supported these activities, even total assimilation was not sufficient -- "nothing less would satisfy them than assaulting all forms of cultural difference, than creating a sense of shame at being 'different'" (Tyack, 1974, p. 235).

From this perspective, the important part of the schooling experience for the immigrant child was the adoption of the correct set of values. These values, of course, encompassed the appropriate political ideas (patriotism, love of the flag, belief in democracy, etc.), but they also covered most areas of human behavior -- from brushing one's teeth to cleaning the windows. Few educators at this time expressed any concerns about indoctrination. Text materials and curriculum guides were explicit in discussing these topics and the teachers were didactic in their instructional approaches. Cleanliness and punctuality were emphasized to the point of obsession for the children in school and for those adults who attended evening classes and other adult education programs (Tyack, 1974).

The political and civic education of the Americanization programs was presented as a means to root out the abuses and corrupt practices which were increasingly blamed on the newcomers (Curti, 1935) or was designed to teach Progressive

political ideals. Thus, Sara O'Brien's English for Foreigners exhorted the student to choose only honest and unselfish men as city officials because "without law and order, property and even life would be unsafe." In a lesson on the American flag from the same text, she concludes with a sentence to copy: "America is another word for opportunity" (Tyack, 1974, p. 236). The basic assumption of the "stable" elements of society is that these uninformed, if not ignorant, foreigners were easily seduced by corrupt politicians. Thus, they must be taught the "correct" knowledge (English language, American history and culture, etc.) and attitudes (patriotism, loyalty, obedience) so that they could not be duped by the machine bosses (Berrol, 1967).

Loren Stiles Minckley, a school superintendent in Kansas, was rather detailed in his discussion of the appropriate curriculum for the Americanization of the immigrant school children. At the heart of this program was the study of American history during the sixth, seventh, eighth, and first part of the ninth grades. This study was to emphasize the biography of great Americans as well as the foundations of our nation, particularly "the principles of government which caused our pilgrim forefathers to leave their native land and seek a land where they are free to think and act." In addition, two years of civics during the seventh and eighth grades were to focus upon the local government and practical activities such as voting and naturalization (Tyack, 1967).

Political documents, symbols, and ceremonies became a part of the curriculum as well as a part of the school day routine. The Pledge of Allegiance and the American flag had been a part of the school day in many parts of the nation; however, they now became objects of study as a fundamental aspect of patriotism. Though some educators such as Minckley emphasized that "to teach patriotism in its broadest sense is to prepare the children for independent, self-governing, thinking citizens," most educators held a much narrower conception of patriotism -- acceptance of the correct ideas, living for one's country, and, in particular, obedience (Tyack, 1967).

A child's inability to overcome cultural or linguistic differences was sometimes confused with disobedience or ignorance. In rural North Dakota, the teacher of Guri Sand, a Norwegian immigrant, assumed that the students mispronounced "j's" and "y's" out of disobedience and punished them for such behavior. Mathilda Staael Smith recalled that her teachers treated the English-fluent students as if they were smart while they ignored the non-English speakers. In other North Dakota communities, Icelandic children were punished or ridiculed for behavior which was appropriate in their culture. For example, teachers often made an issue of brothers and sisters having different surnames since females retained their surname in marriage and passed it to female children (Carlson & Carlson, 1981).

Cohen (1970) re-examined enrollment and testing data collected during the first decade of this century. His analysis

showed that, while immigrant students fared poorly in comparison to native-born children on measures of retardation rates, high school retention, and assessed I.Q., levels of performance varied greatly among the different immigrant groups. Olneck and Lazerson (1974) reviewed much of the same data and had similar findings. Additionally, they examined attendance patterns of immigrants and found, not surprisingly, that those groups with "better" attendance performed better on these measures. These authors also compared the historic cultural values of particular groups. This analysis indicates that those immigrant groups which possessed cultural values supportive of study and learning (e.g., Russian Jewish society) exhibited greater "success" than did those groups which did not share such a normative orientation (e.g., southern Italians). Tyack (1974) discussed this phenomena as the "match and mismatch" in the schooling experience of the immigrant child. Those children from communities that shared that fundamental reverence for schooling did well in America's schools. Quite likely, those immigrant children who did not have that advantage would agree with the Chicago child who, in frustration, said that "school ain't no good. When you works a whole month at school, the teacher she gives you a card to take home, that says how you ain't any good. And yer folks hollers on yer an' hits yer" (p. 238). Thus, in the end, the victim received the blame. Many immigrants did do well in school and, in doing so, created a view that the burden of failure -- indeed, often of shame -- belonged on those who did not.

Conclusion

This examination of the history of the civic education of the immigrant has focused upon the shortcomings of the educational system. However, as we have seen, these inadequacies are reflections of the larger community's attitudes toward this wave after wave of new arrivals. Though many still view the immigrants' experiences in monolithic terms, the kind and quality of those experiences are quite varied. Lest we are careful, one can easily fall into the trap of seeing only the negative aspects of the immigrants' experiences within the American educational system. In doing so, we would overlook those positive, and equally accurate, experiences. Unfortunately, these more positive examples were also more rare, but they can be found.

For many immigrants, the school represented an opportunity that was not available in their native land or, if available, was denied them due to lack of wealth or purposeful discrimination. "Education was free. That subject my father had written about repeatedly.... It was the one sure thing that he was able to promise us when he sent for us; surer, safer than bread or shelter....No application made, no questions asked, no examinations, rulings, exclusions; no machinations, no fees. The doors stood open to everyone of us" (Tyack, 1967, p. 235-236).

In urban schools, and even in many rural ones, children did associate across ethnic lines. The quality of this interaction

was quite varied, but many schools did celebrate the diversity of its student population through ethnic fairs, inviting parents and grandparents to discuss the history and culture of their native lands, and many teachers did attempt to learn the children's language in order to teach English to them (Carlson & Carlson, 1981).

A Mexican boy, Ernesto Galarza, recalled that his elementary school in Sacramento "was not so much a melting pot as a griddle where [the principal] Miss Hopley and her helpers warmed knowledge into us and roasted racial hatreds out of us." In a neighborhood filled with Mexican, Polish, Japanese, Korean, Italian, and other immigrants, Miss Hopley kept telling the students why they were in school: "for those who were alien, to become good Americans; for those who were so born, to accept the rest of us. Off the school grounds we traded insults we heard from our elders. On the playground we were sure to be marched up to the principal's office for calling someone a wop, a chink, a dago, or a greaser." Teachers tried to pronounce the children's names correctly and encouraged them to share their cultures with others in the class. "No one was ever scolded or punished for speaking in his native tongue on the playground It was easy for me to feel that becoming a proud American ... did not mean feeling ashamed of being a Mexican" (Tyack, 1974, p. 240).

This principal and teaching staff were likely motivated by the side of Americanization that Higham (1955) called the impulse of love. This current, based upon a basic respect for the immigrants and their respective cultures and their personal histories, saw the immigrant as a person with much to offer the community and was concerned about their welfare. Unfortunately, the impulse of fear was a much stronger force and its imperious demand for conformity led to the many abuses of the American dream documented here and in other works. Inconsidering the issues of today, we, as social studies educators, must look to

Miss Hopley and her kindred for the attitudes toward and approaches to working with the "new" immigrants, the "new" Americans.

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